

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAB-01

/058 W

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R 131515Z JUL 76

FM AMEMBASSY CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5204

INFO AMCONSUL ALEXANDRIA POUCH

AMCONSUL PORT SAID POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L CAIRO 9480

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT EG

SUBJECT: STARTLING NEW ELECTORAL LAWS

REF: (A) CAIRO 3940, (B) 75 CAIRO 11294

1. PEOPLES ASSEMBLY MET JULY 12 IN WHAT PRESS DESCRIBES AS STORMY THREE-HOUR SESSION. TWO SIGNIFICANT DRAFT BILLS WERE PASSED, BOTH OF WHICH BEAR ON UPCOMING OCTOBER ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS.

2. FIRST, "LAW ON POLITICAL RIGHTS" WAS AMENDED TO "EXEMPT" ARMED FORCES AND POLICE FROM VOTING, "SO THEY MAY UNDERTAKE THEIR BASIC TASKS (UNIMPEDED)." SECOND, IT WAS DETERMINED THAT FOR PURPOSES OF ASU STATUTE REQUIRING THAT 50 PERCENT OF ASSEMBLY MEMBERS BE WORKERS AND PEASANTS, DEFINITION OF WORKERS WOULD BE OFFICIALLY EXPANDED TO INCLUDE MEMBERS OF THE BOARDS OF COMPANIES AND ORGANIZATIONS.

3. COMMENT: THESE ARE STARTLING INNOVATIONS. THE PERMISSION FOR SENIOR ADMINISTRATORS TO RUN AS WORKERS HAD FIRST BEEN SUGGESTED IN JUNE 1975 BY SADAT, WHO IS CHAIRMAN OF ASU, BUT UNTIL NOW HAD NOT BEEN MADE SUBJECT OF A LAW. OBJECT OBVIOUSLY IS TO INCREASE MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASS MEMBERSHIP IN ASSEMBLY AND WILL NO DOUBT BE ATTACKED AS CONTARY TO THE PRINCIPLES OF THE 1952 REVOLUTION.

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4. GOE DETERMINATION TO KEEP THE ARMY OUT OF POLITICS HAS BEEN HIGHLIGHTED NOT ONLY IN SADAT'S SPEECHES IN MARCH (REF A), BUT ALSO IN GAMASY'S SPEEDY ANNOUNCEMENT LAST NOVEMBER (REF B) THAT ENLISTED MEN WHO HAD JOINED AN ASU MINBAR WOULD BE COURT-MARTIALLED. (LAWS OF 1959 PROHIBIT ARMED FORCES FROM "DEALING IN POLITICS.") NEVERTHELESS, TO REMOVE THE FRANCHISE FROM THE ARMY AND THE POLICE IS A MAJOR DECISION FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO TAKE, ESPECIALLY WITH ELECTIONS DUE IN THREE MONTHS, AND WE BELIEVE IT IS LIKELY TO CAUSE CONSIDERABLE DISCONTENT AMONGST THE SUDDENLY DISENFRANCHISED.

5. WE HAVE NOT YET HAD A CHANCE TO DISCUSS THESE NEW LAWS WITH GOE OR PEOPLES ASSEMBLY OFFICIALS, BUT WILL DO AT THE EARLIEST OPPORTUNITY. WE DO KNOW THAT LEFTIST ELEMENTS STRONGLY OPPOSED BOTH NEW LAWS, AND WE EXPECT THAT THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AND THEIR ILK MAY BE DISTRESSED AT THE DISENFRANCHISING OF ARMED FORCES AND POLICE. THE BROTHERHOOD'S MAGAZINE THIS WEEK RECALLS HOW IN ITS HEYDAY THE IKHWAN SOUGHT TO INFILTRATE AND USE THE POLICE AGAINST THE REGIME, AND IT IS WELL KNOWN THAT THE IKHWAN CONSTANTLY SOUGHT TO PENETRATE THE ARMY.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION LAW
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 13 JUL 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976CAIRO09480
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760270-0234
From: CAIRO
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760765/aaaacfia.tel
Line Count: 82
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 CAIRO 3940, 76 CAIRO 11294
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 03 JUN 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <03 JUN 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <06 OCT 2004 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: STARTLING NEW ELECTORAL LAWS
TAGS: PINT, EG
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006